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Tintin as a Catholic Comic: How Catholic Values went Underground

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Historically, the comic series *Tintin* originates in conservative and, indeed reactionary, circles in Belgian Catholicism. Hergé created *Tintin* for the children's weekly of a newspaper that, at that time, shared the main themes of the reactionary Catholic movement: anti-communism, anti-capitalism, anti-Semitism and the fear of "secret societies" and advocated a leading role for Catholic values in the public domain. During World War II, the adventures were made more fictional. In this way, in the eyes of present-day readers, *Tintin* has lost much of his politically and economically involved Catholicism. However, *Tintin* continues to embody Catholic values, albeit in a more implicit way. This interpretation explains those moral aspects of the series that have been considered repellent (e.g. its colonialism), the aspects that have been considered sympathetic (such as its anti-capitalism), and those that are considered self-evident: for instance the dedication to human dignity and the common good.

Introduction

Tintin is generally regarded as the prototype of the European graphic novel. I consider this particular piece of popular culture as an example of the presence of Catholicism in European culture. Often, Roman Catholicism goes without notice. Catholic Social Thought is often considered nothing more than a colourless compromise between liberalism and socialism, dressed up with abstract notions such as human dignity and the common good (Hornsby-Smith 2006). So it could be a challenge to unveil any underlying Catholic values, themes, norms, stereotypes; in short, a Catholic worldview.

Following sociologists such as Andrew Greeley (2000), authors have scrutinized films and literature for traces of the Catholic imagination. The emerging study of comics has just started to pay attention to the ways in

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which religion is disseminated in sequential art (Smith and Duncan 2012; Lewis and Kraemer 2010). I adopt a historical-sociological approach and want to make clear that *Tintin* originates in Belgian Catholicism, and still bears the marks of it. Yet this is a message that may not be a pleasant one for Catholicism, nor for mainstream *Tintin* fans, nor for its critics. There is an abundant literature on this only seemingly tiny subject (Roche and Cerbelaud 2014) and this is quite polarized, partly because of the failure to understand the role of Catholicism.

Tintin is an originally Belgian *bande dessinée* i.e., a “comic”—or a “graphic novel” as the current term is—that has remained popular throughout the world right up to this day. The last completed adventure appeared in the seventies. Still, thanks to the animated videos (Bernasconi 1991–1992), to the games (Ubisoft Montpellier 2011) and to the motion capture computer-animated 3-D version by Steven Spielberg and Peter Jackson (Spielberg 2011), his popularity has not faded. In 2004, 193 million albums were sold, globally (De Vries 2012, 59 n.1). In January 2014, a conference on *Tintin* was held at University College London.¹ However, the social-religious aspects are usually not the main focus of discussion, with only a few exceptions (Delisle 2010; Cerbelaud 2004).

In contrast, *Tintin*’s political convictions have been the object of much debate (Wiki 2015; Farr 2001). Is he a right-wing character, mocking communism and defending colonialism, or is he a left-wing character, fighting the masters of war and captains of industry? A French journalist expressed the general opinion that *Tintin* is neither: he always sides with the truth, justice and the underprivileged (Kehayan 1993; qtd. in Roche and Cerbelaud 2014, 259–260). A club of French Members of Parliament “*tintinophiles*” debated on the issue and largely acknowledged that he is above parties (Guiral 1999; Bussereau 1999; qtd. in Roche and Cerbelaud 2014, 165–166). But *Tintin* is not as abstract as that might imply. I will demonstrate that *Tintin* is anti-communist as well as anti-capitalist, and much more, because he is Roman Catholic.² For a long time, however, a secularist view on Hergé and *Tintin* has prevailed.

The Vatican brought *Tintin*’s Catholic disposition out into the open when *The Adventures of Tintin: The Secret of the Unicorn* (Spielberg 2011),

1. See: <http://www.tintinconference.org>

2. Political scientist Felix Rösch (2014, 234) acknowledges the influence of Catholicism on the early volumes that are often considered as xenophobic, but fails to see how the political and cultural sensibility that we find in later volumes are congruent with Catholic social thought as well.

the first of a planned trilogy, was released. On that occasion *L'Osservatore Romano* re-published the entry on Tintin from the *Dictionnaire amoureux du catholicisme* [Affectionate Dictionary of Catholicism], under the title, *A Catholic Hero* (Tillinac 2011a).³ Its author, Denis Tillinac, states:

He is the guardian angel of Christian values that the West denies or constantly denigrates. Without fear, without blame, Hergé's creation unites with candor the virtues which they tried to teach me in the Catechism. It is of little importance if Hergé was aware of it when lovingly drawing a Creature whose monsters (the gorilla in *The Black Island* and the yeti in *Tintin in Tibet*) were less harmful than the human race. Even if, in daily life, man is not so despicable: the man on the street sins mostly out of inertia. It is pride, the attractiveness of money and the taste for power which ruins everything, that is to say, Caesar and Mammon. (2011b, 561)

Against this background, I will consider to what extent the *Tintin* series can be regarded as Catholic, and relate the question to the biography of its author and the milieu in which the series originated. In this way we can see how Tintin's Catholicism developed.

Tillinac is right in rejecting the idea that Tintin's Catholicism should be linked especially with faith. This was not the Catholicism of the nineteen-thirties, -forties and -fifties, when twenty of the twenty-three completed *Tintin* adventures (1929–1976) were first being published. In the first half of the twentieth century, dichotomies between the natural and the supernatural, reason and revelation, were still active everywhere. Thus social life was not the territory of Catholic theology, but rather of Catholic social philosophy (Salemink 1991, 16–18). Theology was concerned with the supernatural and the afterlife; philosophy with nature, which included the social order, and this life. Catholic scholars developed and applied a system of thought, which they attributed to Thomas Aquinas. This school

3. The entry contains a few flaws. Tintin *does* "pray to God during his brushes with death": for instance, "God rest my soul! Let's die bravely, like a real Belgian!" (*Tintin in America*, b/w, 118). Tillinac mentions that in *Red Rackham's Treasure* Tintin prays for the souls of two scoundrels. In fact, he does so in *The Broken Ear* b/w, 61). Again, the ethnologist Ridgewell appears in *The Broken Ear*, b/w, 48), not in *Tintin in America*. *Jo, Zette and Jocko* (1935–1938) and *Popol Out West* (1934) are *not* Hergé's "first works." *Jo, Zette et Jokko* (1935–1938) was the result of a special request by the editors of *Coeurs Vaillants*. They had some doubts as to whether the lonely hero Tintin would constitute a good example for their young readers. Therefore Hergé delivered this comic about a family. *Popol et Virginie au Far West* was a comic for young children which appeared in *Le Petit Vingtième*, in 1934. Hergé's first comic (*Totor*), cartoons and illustrations appeared in 1926.

of thought ran parallel to the social formation of Catholicism, and it was within this context that Tintin had a position as a Catholic phenomenon.

In the next sections, a sketch of the Belgian variety of this social Catholicism will be followed by a focus on the author's life, the medium and the milieu in which the comic originally appeared, and then by a look at the *Tintin* stories. The drawing style, the jokes and the rhythm of the narrative make up a great deal of their charm (Baetens 1989), but I will focus on just two aspects: the plot and the scenery in which the plot takes place. In this way, we can explore whether the portrayal of the relations between Catholicism, the author and Tintin, as sketched by Hergé himself, is correct. In interviews, Hergé described himself as being politically and religiously unsophisticated: he was only mirroring the opinions held in his surroundings (Assouline 1996, 50). That is why (he said) he was, among other things, a Belgian nationalist and Catholic, with all the opinions inherent in that, including the vile ones. Tintin, however, was, and always is, good. He stands up for the oppressed. Hence, for a long time his creation had served him as a model—until he realized that it was impossible for him to follow Tintin: “Je ne transpose plus la parole évangélique: ‘Soyez parfait comme votre fils est parfait’” [“No longer do I transpose the Gospel word, ‘Be perfect, therefore, as your Son is perfect’”] (Hergé 1964, 253)—a creative reference to Matthew 5:48: “Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.”

Based on the changes in Tintin's world, I will distinguish three periods.⁴ From *Tintin in the Land of the Soviets* (1929–1930), up to and including the first version of *Land of Black Gold* (1939–1941), he is a lonesome hero traveling the world with his dog Milou (Snowy, in the genderless English translation). The stories' original titles refer to the countries (sometimes fictionalized, sometimes not) that he visits. The second period starts with *The Crab with the Golden Claws* (1940–1941), in which supporting character Haddock makes his first appearance. Henceforth, the titles refer to a mystery case. Then, starting with the moon adventures (*Destination Moon/Explorers on the Moon*, 1950–1953), Tintin is surrounded by the Tintin family: a third period. The first period corresponds with the between-war years. The second starts with World War II, the third with the post-war time until the nineteen-eighties.

4. Years of first publication as feuilletton (cf. Apostolidès 1984, 206). Apostolidès, however, starts the third period with *The Calculus Affair*. Thus, the moon adventures are included in the second period, which is (according to him) characterized by the quest for balance between the sphere of heaven and earthly values.

Committed Catholic journalism, 1929–1939

Social Catholicism in Belgium

The strategy of the Roman Catholic Church in an era of modernization was to engage by opposing it (Hellemans 2001). At the beginning of the twentieth century, there were three currents within European Catholicism. The dominant, conservative movement was fiercely opposed to liberalism as well as to socialism. In principle, its spokesmen accepted the economic order as it had developed, but felt it had to be restrained by the state and by joint organizations of workers and employers, whilst the Church would inject the individuals involved with virtues such as justice and love (Salemink 1991, 48). In Belgium, a predominantly Catholic country, the Kristene Arbeidersjeugd-Jeunesse Ouvrière Chrétienne (KAJ-JOC; [Young Christian Workers]), founded in 1924 by the priest Jozef Cardijn, devoted itself in this spirit to the edification of the workers as well as to the restoration of the Christian faith.

Then, there was a reactionary movement that, out of a romantic yearning for the Christian Middle Ages, turned against the *status quo* (Yates 1961). It condemned modern capitalism as being the product of a Jewish conspiracy. Their ideal was a religious renewal of the population, pushing back alcoholism, “de-Jewing” society, and a revival of solidarity. The advocates of this line of thinking were called the Austrian school, after the country of origin of Anton Orel (1881–1959) (Salemink 1991, 43). In Belgium, we encounter this line of thought in parts of Catholic Action, and especially in the movement set up by Léon Degrelle around the Christus-Rex publishing company, which served Catholic Action. “Rex” in particular turned against the Jews, who were alleged to control politics, the financial world and the business world. In 1935, after severe attacks by Degrelle against the clergy, Rex was condemned by the Belgium episcopate. During the thirties, however, stereotypes of the Rich Jew appeared widely in the Catholic press (Poorthuis and Salemink 2006).

A progressive Catholicism siding with the workers constituted a third current. However, this movement was rendered marginal on account of its alleged modernism, which Popes Pius IX and Pius X had condemned. In later years, the left-wing of the Catholic Action evolved in Belgium.

In the context of the national controversy over the funding of confessional education, Catholics were mobilized against the “Freemason government” (Figure 1). Secularization was on the increase, and there was the

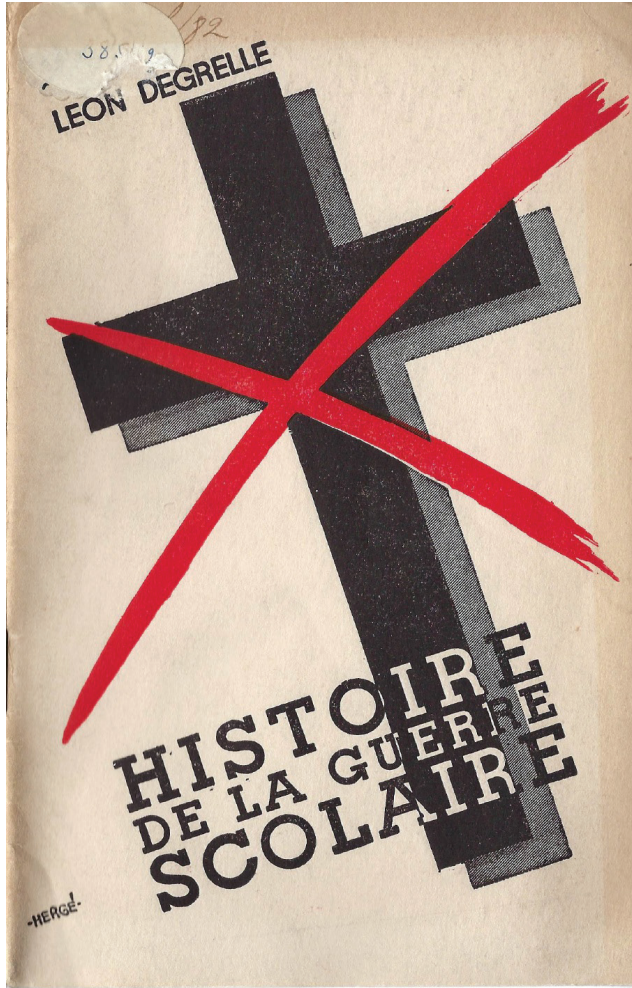


Figure 1. Léon Degrelle, *Histoire de la guerre scolaire* (1932). Cover by Hergé.

“danger” of the anti-clerical socialist movement. In this context, numerous Catholics thought that the Jews were the accomplices of Freemasonry and socialism. This particular view may have been promoted by Jesuits who had moved to Belgium after having been expelled from Italian cities. The “Jewish influence” was held responsible for the ban.

The renewed interest in the social teaching of Thomas Aquinas also contributed to Catholic anti-Semitism. Louvain University was a centre of neo-Thomism. At the Institute for Thomist Philosophy, Désiré Mer-



Figure 2. Raymond De Becker, *Towards a New Order* (1931). Cover by Hergé, co-published by Hergé.

cier and his students advocated a radical solution of *la question juive* [the Jewish question]: back to the exclusion and segregation laws that were in force prior to the French Revolution (Saerens 2000, 43). An article on this subject by Mercier's pupil Simon Deploige, was even re-published as a brochure to address a wider audience.

During World War I, the Catholic party newspaper *Le XX^e Siècle* [*The XXth Century*] started a campaign for entrusting Palestine (then a British protectorate) to Belgium, the country of Godfrey of Bouillon, the

Crusader (Saerens 2000, 111). This newspaper became Belgian nationalism's mouthpiece against the internationalists, the pacifists, and the Flemish nationalists. Nationalist Belgium was looking forward to an authoritarian New Order, in which parliament would belong to the past (Figure 2). Examples were found in Italy, where Benito Mussolini was busy setting things straight, and in France, where Charles Maurras was heading the Catholic, anti-democratic and monarchist *Action Française*. This movement saw foreign enemies and *les métèques* [immigrants] as a major threat. Parliament was considered as an obstruction to getting things done. In fact, in 1932, the Belgian government dissolved parliament.

One of the few Catholic Belgian nationalists was the priest Norbert Wallez, a teacher at a Walloon preparatory seminary. He frequently agitated against the Jews ("*les métèques de métèques*" [immigrants of the immigrants]) in *Le XX^e Siècle*. After the First World War, this anti-Semitism became widely accepted by the newspaper, by emphasizing the Jews' alleged involvement in revolutionary actions and conspiracies (Van Doorslaer 2007, 57). Wallez pointed to the world of high finance controlled by the people of Israel, atheist communism and wild capitalism, and promoted "platonian fascism" instead, which favoured a united Catholic Rhineland against Prussia. His ideal was as a society in which all social classes worked together as one (Wallez 1923; Assouline 2009).

Hergé, a Rigorist Catholic

Georges Prosper Remi Remi,⁵ born in 1907 in Etterbeek, a district of Bruxelles, was the son of a Flemish mother and a Walloon father. His father took him to church; his mother introduced him into the world of cinema. He found his way to Roman Catholic Scouting circles via his school, the archdiocesan Collège Saint-Boniface. In Scouting's official magazine, *Le Boy Scout*, he made his publishing début, *Les aventures de Totor, C.P. des hannetons* (1922) [*The Adventures of Totor, Chief Scout of the Cockshafers*], a comic with captions. He also devoted himself to the Scouts' moral education. He wrote the statement of policy of *Atelier de la fleur de lys* [*The Workshop of the Lilly*]. Moral education, the statement stipulates, is more important than technical training. The model of the guild (pupil, journeyman, master) under the supervision of a priest-director was prescribed (Van Opstal 1994, 177).⁶

5. When Hergé's birth was registered, the family name happened to be taken as a third surname as well.

6. Van Opstal 1994 is an excellently documented study of Hergé and Tintin. It is one of

His former Scoutmaster got Hergé an office job with the printing and publishing company Presse et Librairie. The journalist and literature teacher Norbert Wallez, here known as *Abbé* [Father] Wallez, had just been appointed as its managing director, at the recommendation of Désiré Mercier, who by now had become archbishop of Mechlin and a cardinal (Assouline 2009, 13). In the company's publications all political parties, the Catholic included, were attacked. The language used was filled with insult, anti-Semitism and misogyny. Guidelines were derived from Action Française, until its media were placed on the Index in December 1926 (Van Opstal 1994, 188). Its most important publication was the newspaper *Le XX^e Siècle*, established in 1895 as the Belgian Catholic Party's daily. Its motto was "Pax Christi in Regno Christi," its subtitle, "Journal Catholique et National de Doctrine et d'Information." Under Wallez's leadership, it started to adopt a reactionary stance that was developed further in the *Revue Internationale des Sociétés Secrètes* [*International Review of Secret Societies*] (Saerens 2000, 113).

The young Hergé can't have missed the advertisements of *Le XX^e Siècle* in magazines published by the Action Catholique de Jeunesse Belge [Catholic Action of the Belgian Youth]. These express a militant, nationalist, corporatist Catholicism.

Promote the Catholic Press, *Le XX^e Siècle*. Promote! Promote! What we want: the greatness of the Church of Belgium; the home country united, free, prosperous, beautiful and radiant; the fraternal and active sympathy of all social classes; the profound and unchangeable friendship of Flanders and Wallonia. Young people, who want to propagate the Catholic Press, circulate the *XX^e Siècle*, the Catholic and national journal of doctrine and information. The individual apostolate is a duty. Young people, forward! [Translation mine] (*Le blève qui lève* 8, 21-2-1926, quoted in Van Opstal 1994, 187)

The newspaper advocated the spirit of the individual apostolate, which was aimed at transforming the world according to the Church's ideals. When, in 1927, Wallez invited Hergé to start working as a graphic artist,

the few publications that escape the apologetic patterns in which the story is usually told. The "official" biography tells that a politically and religiously naive Hergé developed the comic *Tintin* as a new form of art while dealing in an opportunist way with difficult circumstances, such as a conservative newspaper editor and a national-socialist regime. Van Opstal shows that *Tintin* was part of a larger moral project, fully sustained by Hergé. He was active in an ideological movement which was operative even during the years of the German occupation.

Hergé joined this mission. He developed a new logo, featuring *Le Vingtième Siècle* instead of *Le XX^e Siècle*, and drew comics, based on scenarios that were supplied to him.

The first book cover he designed was for a new edition of the prayer book, *L'Année avec Marie ou Marie nous aidante à méditer l'Évangile pour tous les jours de l'année* [*The year with Mary, or, Mary helping us meditate on the Gospel during all the days of the year*] by Father André Prévot SCJ (1928).⁷ He evolved as an illustrator, producing drawings for various magazines of Catholic Action, such as *Le blève qui lève* [*Growing Crops*], *L'Effort* and *Petits Belges*. He illustrated satirical Catholic magazines, for example, a caricature of Uncle Sam and soldiers of the Red Army (figure 3), and supplements of the newspaper, such as *Votre Vingtième Madame* and *Le Vingtième artistique et littéraire*. He illustrated a review of *Le Juif errant est arrivé* [*The Wandering Jew Has Arrived*] by investigative journalist Albert Londres, and of *Bambi le chevreuil* [*The Roe Deer Bambi*] by Felix Salten. In October 1928, Hergé, as an editor, even started a new, illustrated supplement: *Le Petit Vingtième*. This children's weekly was to replace the "lamentable coarseness" infecting a lot of families.⁸

In this time, Hergé became acquainted with the American comic books that *Vingtième* editor Léon Degrelle had brought with him after his (failed) journey to the Roman Catholic rebels in Mexico. Inspired by these balloon comics, Hergé made his own first comics without captions, which appeared in the satirical Catholic magazine *Le Sifflet* [*The Catcall*] (3 December 1928). One was called *Réveillon* [*Christmas Eve*]. It tells the short story of a restaurant owner who puts false pearls in his oysters. His waiter is part of the conspiracy and presents himself as an expert on pearls. This character is apparently Jewish and bears the name of Jeroboam Aahslach [Jeroboam Asshole]. In the other cartoon (*La Noël du petit enfant sage* [*The Good Little Boy's Christmas*]), a wispy-haired boy finds a turd of his white fox terrier for his Christmas present (Van Opstal 1994). "Borms," says the little nipper, and this is a jibe at the Flemish nationalist August Borms, against whom a hate campaign was organized in these circles. Humour and ideological commitment went hand in hand.

These two controversial cartoons are usually neglected in the history of *Tintin*, but it was because of this political-satirical work that Wallez tasked

7. On the cover of this edition, the author's name is misspelled as R.P. André Prévost. Assouline takes this founding member of the Society of the Priests of the Heart of Jesus (SJC) for a Jesuit (SJ).

8. *Le Vingtième Siècle* 31-10-1928, qtd. in Van Opstal 1994, 226. Translation mine.

Hergé with creating a story taking place in the still young Soviet Union, using just such a boy and dog. He handed him some documentation: *Moscou sans voiles* [*Moscow unveiled*] (Douillet 1928) and a series of articles published by the journalist Albert Londres. The result, *Tintin in the Land of the Soviets*, became a success. It was even published in the brand-new newspaper of the French Catholic youth movement, *Coeurs Vaillants* [*Valiant Hearts*]. Germaine Kieckens, Father Wallez's secretary, assisted Hergé, anonymously, with the inking. On 21 July 1931, the two of them were married by Wallez: in these years he obliged all his unmarried employees to marry the partners whom he had in store for them (Assouline 2009, 33).

Meanwhile, a second adventure had been published. This was not on Tintin's visit to America, as Hergé wished for. Wallez had decreed that Tintin, on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of taking possession of "our beautiful colony Congo," should go there in order to stimulate vocations. Belgium had obtained this colony from King Leopold II in 1908, after strong international protests against the devastating regime in his "private colony." Again, Hergé received one-sided documentation,⁹ although the same journalist Albert Londres had just published on the atrocities of the colonial regime in neighbouring French Congo (*Terre d'ébène* [*Land of Ebony*]). In a certain way, Hergé's mission to propagate the Christian colonization project harmonized well with his personal development during these years. With hindsight, he said about this time that he "thought that he had the faith." In his own words, under Germaine's and Father Wallez's influence, Hergé developed into a "rigorist" Catholic (Sadoul 1989, 128–135).

Indeed, Hergé's activities showed an affinity with the Catholic battle against laicization. He participated in *Capelle-aux-Champs* [Chapel of the Field], a society of Catholic artists. With his colleague and friend Raymond De Becker, he chaired a publishing company *Jeunesse indépendante catholique* [Independent Catholic Youth] (Van Opstal 1994, 24). He designed various covers, such as for *Le Christ: Roi des affaires* [*Christ, King of Business*] (1931) and *Pour un ordre nouveau* [*For a New Order*] (1931), written by De Becker himself (Steeman 1991, 20–21). Soon, Hergé started to design more covers for the publishing company Casterman, which called itself "pontifical." Among these were one for *Histoire de la guerre scolaire 1877–1884* [*History of the war over the schools 1877–1884*] by Léon Degrelle (1932) (Figure 3); *La légende d'Albert 1er, Roi des Belges* [*The Leg-*

9. See: <http://en.tintin.com/albums/show/id/26/page/0/0/tintin-in-the-congo>



Figure 3. *Le Vingtième littéraire et artistique* numéro spécial (20 March 1930).
Illustration by Hergé.

end of Albert 1st, King of Belgians] by Paul Werrie (1934), and *L'Eglise & le monde moderne* [*The Church and the Modern World*] by René Boigelot SJ (1936) (Assouline 1996, 89) (Steeman 1991, 20–21). Léon Degrelle also chose Hergé's expressionist design for the billboard of the Catholic Party, intended for the 1932 elections: a skull wearing a gas mask.¹⁰ The cap-

10. This cooperation was followed by an argument about copyright. In the de-Catholicized version of Hergé's political biography, presented by Hergé himself and the

tion read: “Against an invasion—vote Catholic.” (Only four years later, the Catholic party stopped working with Degrelle, who subsequently established his own political party.)

In *Le Petit Vingtième*, editor Hergé published warnings of the Bolshevik danger, and condemnations of capitalist greed and jibes at Jewish compatriots, next to knitting patterns, Scouting tips and a *Tintin* page, alongside a question from a reader. In addition, he supplied journalistic contributions. Alternating with Paul Jamin he wrote the editorial, “A Word from Uncle Joe.” In it, the newspaper’s social Catholicism found natural expression. An example is the 1st February 1934 editorial, railing against “cinemas, theatres, crime magazines” that are accessible to children:

They praise crime, vice, rape, they exploit scandals. It sells, sells! The Isaacs, Felsenbergs, and other Lévy’s fill their pockets and make fortunes. Slowly they poison the world, by corrupting the young. Christ curse[d] those who cause scandals, especially if these scandals touch the young. They should take all these rotten publications and make a packet of them, tie it all up to a millstone, and throw it to the bottom of the sea. After also having tied to it all those who live by these shameful and unhealthy activities. *Le Vingtième Siècle*, 1-2-1934. (Qtd. in Assouline 2009, 39)

The biblical reference might have been missed by biographer Assouline, since he characterizes this advice as “unevangelical.” Yet, this archaic punishment continued the earlier reference made to Mark’s Gospel (9:42 KJV): “And whosoever shall offend one of these little ones that believe in me, it is better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he were cast into the sea.” Evangelical inspiration and economic anti-Semitism met in a crusade against modern culture.

Apparently, *Tintin* was presented as an alternative. In those very days, Hergé was finishing “with minimal effort” the adventures of Tintin in the East. These were later published by Casterman in the album called *The Cigars of the Pharaoh*. The reviewer in *Le Vingtième artistique et littéraire* (24 October 1934), Mgr. Jean-Philippe Schyrgens, a supporter of Degrelle and Hergé, praised this “excellent crime magazine for children” as an outstanding, and morally sound piece of art of excellent quality (Assouline 1996, 87–88).

Meanwhile, Father Wallez had left the newspaper after a political conflict, leaving a juridical claim at Casterman’s that *he*, as *Tintin*’s creator,

Hergé Foundation, this argument is taken as proof that Hergé “always had had an aversion” against the Rex movement (Couvreur 2013, 6).

should be regarded as the owner of the copyright on *Tintin*. After his departure, Hergé resigned and henceforth restricted himself to delivering his comics. Working at *Tintin* became his main activity rather than a side issue, and the comics series itself was raised to a higher level thanks to Father Léon Gosset, the Chinese students' chaplain at Louvain's Catholic University.

Gosset introduced Hergé to the Catholic art student Zhang Chongren, raised by Jesuits, who educated Hergé in Chinese political nationalism, Eastern philosophy and the art of drawing. Zhang became the unacknowledged co-author of a milestone in Hergé's oeuvre, *The Blue Lotus*. He was also the source of inspiration for the character of Chang, who makes his entry here (Van Nieuwenborgh and Chang 1993). Whilst Hergé's personal commitment to Catholicism is often ignored, this involvement with Chinese nationalism is part of the popularized biography of Hergé. Through this involvement, Hergé's view on international politics started to differ from the usual view in his milieu, which tended to favour Japan over China.

An instrument of providence

Each one of the Catholic social themes that circulated in Hergé's world can be found back in Tintin's first adventures. In this period, Tintin is an instrument of Providence in the battle against evil. Against the background of the prevailing social Catholicism, there is no antithesis at all between the anti-communism of *Tintin in the Land of the Soviets* (1929–1930) and the anti-capitalism of *Tintin in America* (1932–1934). In the former, Tintin exposes, in between slapstick chases, how the Russian people are extorted, bled dry and intimidated, while visiting English communists swallow the lies they are fed. In the latter, Tintin arrives in a country in which the underworld and the world above have close ties, black people are lynched in passing, Native Americans are chased from their territories, and material progress is spreading at high speed. In the original black-and-white version, Tintin is even chased by a bearded man, wearing a kaftan and a black hat: "Mr. Tintin! Join our movement! ... Convert to neo-Judeo-Buddho-Islamo Americanism and earn the highest dividend in the world!" (*Tintin in America*, b/w, 88). Each country demonstrates an opposite of Catholic ideals.

In between these two, *Tintin in the Congo* (1930–1931) sings the praise of the missionaries who are exporting Belgian civilization. Tintin represents the good Belgians who liberate the childlike black people from manipulat-

ing chieftains and medicine men, as well as from nasty white Americans.¹¹ Nearly all “negroes” in the story are portrayed in the same way, as was customary in the Western tradition of black stereotyping (Maurin Abomo 2000; Strömberg 2003, 71; Lefèvre 2008). Their lips are extraordinarily thick; their speech is characterized by the absence of the inflected verb. They are kind, lazy, dumb, emotional and, in the end, adoring Tintin and Snowy. Protests against the “civilizing influence of the whites” (b/w, 56) are not absent, but these are subordinated to the main plot: Al Capone’s plan to eliminate this investigative reporter, motivated by the (false) pre-supposition that Tintin has come to Congo in order to expose his plans to control the diamond industry and to install a reign of terror. Tintin, however, outsmarts the gangsters and is picked up by a plane back to Belgium.¹² The epilogue suggests: the whole continent is mourning because of his departure.

After these caricatures of two of social Catholicism’s important adversaries, and an outline of Catholic Belgium’s duty toward its colony, Tintin is sent east, that is to say, to Egypt and India (1932–1934). *En route* he bumps into the billionaire Roberto Rastapopoulos, Chief Executive of Cosmos Pictures (*The Cigars of the Pharaoh* b/w, 4). This character bears a strong resemblance to the common Jewish stereotype of those days: a dandy with heavy eyebrows, a cigar in his face, big nose and thick lips. Later in the story, Tintin accidentally finds himself at his film set, just when two smirking Arabs, whip in hand, are looking down on a white woman in a ragged dress lying at their feet (*The Cigars of the Pharaoh*, b/w, 33). Rastapopoulos puts on a charming front; *Le Petit Vingtième’s* readers, of course, know better: this must be “another Levy.” And indeed: in *The Blue Lotus* (1934–1935), Rastapopoulos turns out to be the “Grand Master” of a secret lodge, an international society of drugs and arms smugglers, dressed in Ku Klux Klan-like robes (*The Cigars of the Pharaoh*, b/w, 107; *The Blue Lotus*, b/w, 128). This adventure is set against the background of the Mukden Incident (18 September 1931), Japan’s pretence for the invasion of the Northern part of China known as Manchuria. Whilst the story’s message of anti-imperialism and pro-Chinese nationalism has been duly registered by subsequent commentators, its conspiracy motif has been overlooked.

11. Since 2007, when lawyer David Enright protested against the selling of *Tintin in the Congo* in the UK, this album has been the subject of several lawsuits (Rifas 2012).

12. Jean-Marie Apostolides (1984, 67–68) draws a far-fetched comparison of this scene with Christ’s Ascension.

This way we recognize, after the anti-communism, missionary colonialism and anti-capitalism, an element typical of the reactionary variant of the social Catholic worldview: thinking in terms of conspiracies, which reveals itself in the fear of the assumed secret societies of Jews and Freemasons, pulling strings through their accomplices in the arms, drugs and oil trade, and in international politics.

The craving for money threatens the social order: this is the central theme in the entire first period, and is most strongly manifest in *The Broken Ear* (1935–1937). The plot involves a stolen fetish. This is pursued with blind desire until death; no one succeeds in laying their hands on the original: what is left are endless copies of the original (Serres 2000). The historical political setting is the Gran Chaco war between Bolivia and Paraguay (here: “Gran Chapo”), provoked by Standard Oil (Esso) and British Petroleum (Shell). But while Hergé picks a recognizable arms dealer from the world news (Basil Zaharoff), he misses the opportunity to portray the oil barons. Instead of Standard Oil’s J.D. Rockefeller and Shell’s Henri Deterding, he depicts stereotypical, cigar-smoking, big-nosed gentlemen in morning dress. Maliciously and out of avarice, the British-American capitalist conspiracy creates political chaos. Mammon, in Tillinac’s terms, is a danger to the status quo and has a Jewish face.

Mammon is again central, but in a completely different way, in a *Nouveau aventure* (1937–1938), later published as *The Black Island*. In it, Tintin rounds up a German-Russian gang of counterfeiters. Quite remarkably, he risks his own life in order to restore trust in the Belgian and French francs, the Dutch guilder, and the British pound sterling. This political trend is continued in *King Ottokar’s Sceptre*, originally published as *Tintin in Syldavia* (1938–1939) in which Tintin helps the king of Syldavia to keep his throne. In the story, the leader of the Iron Guard party is threatening to hand over the country to neighbouring Borduria. This story refers to the reports in *Le Vingtième Siècle* during that period about Italy’s involvement with the political situation in Albania, where Ahmed Bey Zogu had crowned himself as the successor of Albania’s medieval kings. His power was challenged by the fascist party. In the end, Mussolini invaded Albania to “protect” the fascists. In the comic, Tintin favours the king, which harmonizes with Belgian Catholicism’s love for the monarchy, but implies that Hergé distanced himself from the political preference of Father Wallez, who admired Mussolini.

Zionism plays a role in the last pre-war adventure, *Land of Black Gold* (1939–1941), completed in the years 1948–1950. Against the background

of an imminent world war, sabotaged petrol is causing devastating explosions. In the end, it turns out that the culprit again has to be found in German-Russian quarters, but in the meantime Tintin is arrested by the British in Palestine and kidnapped (by mistake) by the Jews, before falling into the hands of “the diabolical Arabs.”¹³ In short, almost all of the various reactionary Catholic interests get a chance: the struggle against communism, American capitalism, and international conspiracies of Freemasons and Jews. The defence of the present economic and political order rather suits the conservative agenda. Tintin shows how divine providence is at work in the world of his time.

Serving the New Order, 1940–1945

Collaborative Catholicism under the German regime

When, in May 1940, the Germans occupied Belgium, King Leopold III soon capitulated, and called for the resumption of normal life. This “neutral” attitude towards the new regime made him a controversial figure, after the War ended, along with Cardinal Van Roey, who probably supported his plans for an autocratic Catholic New Order (Gevers 2004). In Catholic circles, living under the German regime was initially seen as the materialization of the long-awaited New Order. The old antitheses between classes, ideologies, and between Flanders and Wallonia, were being transcended, albeit under German rule. The (now required) rhetoric against the Bolsheviks, big business, and the subversive influences of Jews and Freemasons, was in line with what was in vogue already. Rex blended in with national-socialism. During 1941, however, Catholic organizations were side-lined and the Church withdrew into the spiritual area—until the repression and the persecution of the Jews erupted with great violence. Then, alongside the expectation of Germany’s defeat, resistance arose in Catholic circles, too (Van Doorslaer 2007).

Slave of the pagan religion?

During the mobilization, Hergé continued to work on *Tintin*. After the invasion, accompanied by his wife, he fled the country and migrated to France. However, after King Leopold’s call, he returned and got back to business although *Le Vingtième Siècle* had been suppressed. In Septem-

13. The unfriendly looking faces of the Jewish men have been revised for the 1950 album version. Since 1971, all references to Palestine/Israel have been removed at the British publisher’s request. <http://studio16mmjackinthebooks.blogspot.nl/2012/04/tintin-in-palestine.html>

ber, Tintin's adventures started to appear in the collaborating newspaper *Het laatste nieuws* [The Latest News], for the first time in Flemish. The French-language *Le Soir* [The Evening] had been "stolen" and subjected to the rule of the Propaganda Abteilung [Department of Propaganda]. Hergé accepted an invitation from his friend Raymond De Becker to work for this newspaper, like his friends Paul Jamin and Jacques Van Melkebeke, initially with a view to setting up *Le Soir-Jeunesse*.

For nearly a year, the content of *Le Petit Vingtième* was continued, with jokes, interesting facts, and the call to live a joyful and courageous life. At Christmas, authors invoke the Gospel and the Catholic tradition to sustain this message (Couvreur 2013). De Becker (2013 [1941]) asks the young readers to guard "the sacred heritage" of their ancestors in the "new Europe." In his archives, Hergé kept an anonymous letter from "a father of a large family," who accused him of actually propping up this newspaper by publishing the immensely popular *Tintin* in it.

Then little by little children will come under the new influence. Insidiously and deceitfully the venom of their neo-pagan religion from beyond the Rhine will be introduced in the margins of your entertaining drawings. They will no longer speak of God, of the Christian family, of the Catholic ideal [...] Can you agree to collaborate in this terrible act, a real sin against the Spirit? (Qtd. in Assouline 2009, 72)

Whilst this particular Catholic fan loathed collaboration with German Nazism's implicit religion, the prevailing attitude was one of accommodation. The French Catholic weekly *Coeurs vaillants*, by now combined with an edition for girls, *Âmes vaillants* [Valiant Souls], also resumed the publication of *Tintin*, under the collaborating Vichy regime of Marshall Pétain. At *Le Soir*, Raymond De Becker tried to promote Belgian nationalism within the National-Socialist ideology. When this was no longer tolerated, De Becker was fired, but Hergé kept delivering *Tintin*.

When life is regulated, as in times of mobilization and war, it is simple—Hergé will say in hindsight (Sadoul 1989, 112). Production was high. With the continuing, but often disregarded, assistance of his wife Germaine, and Alice Devos, he was drawing new comics. From 1944 onwards, Edgar P. Jacobs, himself the author of the series *Blake and Mortimer*, was his close co-worker (Mouchart 2011). At Casterman's request they re-worked albums that had already appeared, for the changeover to sixty-two-page albums in colour. They excluded the first *Tintin* album, regarded as too clumsy by Hergé himself, but were not withheld to redraw the early

adventures in Congo and the Orient. The texts were made more universal, hence less Catholic and Belgian. References to religion and reality that were unnecessary for the story, were deleted.

Hergé started to fear, already in September 1943, that at the end of the occupation a day of reckoning would arrive.¹⁴ The Resistance put him on a blacklist, called “Gallery of Traitors.” His former executives and friends (Norbert Wallez and Raymond De Becker) were imprisoned, some of them waiting for a death sentence, which eventually was not carried out (Paul Jamin). Some colleagues, however, were executed. Hergé “didn’t understand a thing of it,” because he never ceased believing in their integrity (Assouline 1996, 431). “It showed an enormous intolerance. It was horrible, horrible!” (Peeters 1983, 28) The charge against Hergé himself was dismissed, yet he was unable to get his work published. Behind the scenes, former Resistance people made every effort to keep him out of the storm, because they wanted to involve Hergé in the establishment of a new youth magazine. Raymond Leblanc acquired for Hergé the indispensable Certificate of Good Citizenship, in exchange for his support for the intended French/Dutch weekly *Tintin/Kuifje*.

Tintin: Main character in a mysterious affair

In this second period, *Tintin* follows the pattern of the Church’s reaction to the new circumstances. Tintin still invokes God and the heavens, and the fight against big business continues, along with the battle against alcohol and drugs. In *The Crab with the Golden Claws* (1940–1941), Captain Haddock makes his entry as the alcoholic captain of an English ship (sailing under the Armenian flag) that, unbeknownst to him, carries opium. Appealing to his “*dignité*” (translated in the English edition as “reputation”), Tintin succeeds in getting this enemy over to his side (colour, 16). They end up in Morocco, which in those days is governed by Vichy-France. It is therefore with the help of the French army that they succeed in tracking down the smuggler gang’s Arab boss. “Our young compatriot” hands the villains over to the French police and receives the compliments of an

14. It is tempting to interpret a scene from the story he was then working on as an expression of the way Hergé hoped that collaborators would be dealt with. Tintin and Haddock acquit a butler (Nestor) who has attacked Tintin, because he had only been following orders and had been fooled into thinking that Tintin was a criminal (*The Secret of the Unicorn*, colour, 54–55). This reference to obedience is both in accordance with authoritarian notions in Catholic Scouting and with a fundamental principle in totalitarian systems of thought.

agent of the Japanese secret police—a striking turnabout when compared to the latter's earlier malicious role in *The Blue Lotus* (b/w, 150).

Big money again plays a nasty role in *The Shooting Star* (1941–1942). The story starts in an apocalyptic setting: a gigantic ball of fire is threatening to annihilate Earth. However, it turns out that it's just a meteorite that falls into the Arctic Ocean. Tintin joins a European scientific expedition, which is obstructed by an American commercial expedition. This one is financed by the New York banker Blumenstein (later renamed as Bohlwinkel in the fictional Sao Rico): an elegantly dressed gentleman with a big nose and a cigar between his thick lips (*The Shooting Star*, colour, 22). By playing dirty tricks, this crew tries to be the first to reach the meteorite, but Europe appears morally and technologically superior. Interestingly, up until then, the reactionary Catholic worldview is fairly congruent with that of the German occupier: beware of (Jewish-American) big business!

Soon, however, Tintin's Catholic face loses some of its colour when it comes to Catholicism's political aspects. Apolitical, and remarkably materialistic, is *The Secret of the Unicorn/Red Rackham's Treasure* (1942–1943). Tintin's mission—to reveal to the public what kinds of injustice are happening in remote countries and to fight them—seems to have faded away. Tintin does not act as a defender of the weak, but supports his friend to collect the riches of his ancestry, although, in the album version, a moral is put on Tintin's lips that can encourage a more spiritual reading of the story: one must travel in order to discover the treasures hidden in one's own house (colour, 61). With respect to the theme of anti-Semitism, one detail has escaped attention thus far. A black-bearded collector called Ivan Ivanovitch Sakharine (the name may reflect the Yiddish word for haggler: “*sjacheraar*”) turns out *not* to be guilty of stealing: the stereotype is ruptured. (The stereotype is reinstated again in Steven Spielberg's movie [2011], in which Sakharine *does* get the part of the evil genius.) This departure from bashing Jews parallels the changing attitude of the Roman Catholic Church. The context, however, is an adventure that is atypical for Tintin as the personified pursuit of the common good.

A permanent turnabout is evident in *The Seven Crystal Balls/Prisoners of the Sun* (1943–1945; 1946–1948). Tintin's world becomes enchanted, preluded by mysterious growth forces in *The Shooting Star*. Until then, the natural and the supernatural had been separate. The adventures took place in a more or less realistic world. Now, however, there is a leading part for voodoo. One by one, seven European explorers, who have desecrated Inca

graves, are stricken by terrible tortures, because of magical incantations.¹⁵ In the first period, Tintin would have found a rational explanation for their suffering.

As the Catholic Church moved from a politics of accommodation, to a retreat to religious affairs, and to confrontation with Catholic collaborators and resistance against the persecution of Jews, Tintin moved from cooperating with the authorities of the New Europe and their Japanese ally, to a non-political attitude. He goes on a treasure hunt and explores the Inca culture, meanwhile expanding his worldview with magic. Slowly, a distance arises between the Catholic worldview and the world of Tintin.

Towards a mythical universe, 1946–1986

Catholicism restored and modernized

After the liberation, the pre-war Catholic aversion against American capitalism evaporated. The Church resumed her position against socialism, even though cooperation between Catholics and socialists was pursued in Francophone Belgium. Starting in the sixties, involvement with the Church decreased in Belgium. The Church itself opened up to the world. Social criticism obtained, or rather regained, its place in the Catholic worldview. Protests were sounded against the war in Vietnam, against nuclear weapons, against racism and exploitation in Africa, Asia and South America. Church leaders opposed consumerist society and the threats to the environment, but also condemned abortion and contraception, a point of view that met with protests or at least shrugs from Catholics themselves. Catholicism acquired a more modern face, but still broke through the stereotypes of left and right (Pasture 1992).

The purity demon killed

Tintin magazine was not a Catholic initiative, but its publishers sought and found cooperation with Catholic youth institutions. In the early decades, Catholic ethics guarded the content, Catholic imagery was present and the *Club Tintin* promoted Catholic scouting ideals: in ten articles, the members vowed to be pure and courageous and to serve God and their home country. In name, Hergé became the artistic director of the magazine, but he was troubled by his private life and the hostile atmosphere towards former collaborators, whom he continued to support (Assouline

15. See (Frey 2004) for a reading of these adventures as a continued expression of the “fear of contagion,” a popular narrative in the right-wing Belgian and French movement.

1996). He considered immigrating to South America, withdrew himself in Switzerland instead, suffering from a severe depression and had a few extramarital affairs. He briefly stopped working at *Tintin*, returned and gathered around him a group of co-workers, establishing Studio Hergé. In this period, Tintin became an international celebrity.

In 1956, Hergé started a relationship with a young co-worker, Fanny Vlamincx. He struggled with his conscience, moulded by Roman Catholic Scouting, became depressed while working on *Tintin in Tibet*, and consulted a Jungian psychiatrist. This contact taught him that he had overstretched his personality by squeezing himself into the Catholic strait-jacket. With great difficulty, he said later, he succeeded in freeing himself from it, in order to become “authentic.” “By killing the purity demon in myself,” he had extricated himself from a strongly prescriptive idea of sin (Peeters 1983, 29–30; Sadoul 1989, 49). Hergé managed to complete the album he was working on, but afterwards his production declined. At the request of foreign publishers and attentive readers his studio was constantly adjusting stories that already had been published; new stories were created with increasing slowness.

At the end of the seventies, *via* his interest in Jung, Hergé started to become engrossed in Zen Buddhism and Taoism (Peeters 1983, 25). When, in an interview, he was asked about his political interests, he quotes Zhuangzi: “Do not seek after truth any longer. Just stop cherishing your beliefs.” After all, they who uphold beliefs want to defend them, and in that way they threaten to challenge the right to exist of those who uphold different beliefs. This does not imply relativism, and neither does it imply a farewell to his Catholic background. In this context, he praised Father Wallez, who couldn’t have cared less about the left-wing satirical press tearing him to pieces (Sadoul 1989, 90). Hergé objects to religion, in the sense of Church, God and dogmas, but he values *religare* (to connect), in the Oriental sense, in as far as it concerns the relationship between humans and the universe, following the Tao. In his opinion, the most important value is a social attitude, courtesy, respect for one’s neighbour. In addition, he displayed a continuing interest in the paranormal: divination, fortune-telling and extra-terrestrial life (Lambert 2012). In 1983 he died, and was buried with Catholic rites.

Pivot of an imaginary universe

After the transformations *Tintin* underwent in the second period, Tintin no longer is a solitary Catholic journalist, commenting on the state of the

world. An imaginary Tintin universe has taken shape. The connection with the Catholic world has been fictionalized. Old and new Catholic themes will appear in Tintin's own universe, in which Tintin's "family" play their parts: an emotionally labile older friend (Captain Haddock), an absent-minded professor (Calculus), two unpredictable detectives (Thomson and Thompson), and an *opera diva* with a histrionic personality (Bianca Castafiore)—to mention only the best-known members. Evil springs less and less from the usual suspects in the Catholic worldview, and increasingly from characters who have their own permanent place in Tintin's world. It's not the Bolsheviks, but characters such as Dr Müller, Boris and Colonel Sponsz who have it in for Tintin and are violating the common good. It's not Jewish capitalism that is spreading death and destruction, but moneybags Roberto Rastapopoulos, who, moreover, is increasingly ridiculed (*The Red Sea Sharks*, *Flight 714*). Fictive characters replace walk-ons like Bazaroff and Blumenstein. *Tintin's* distance from reality becomes a bit greater.

Yet, on further consideration, the prevailing Catholic themes from the old times are present in this new world also. In the moon adventures, as well as in *The Calculus Affair* (1954–1956), Tintin again joins battle with the communist regime, by now represented by Borduria. The purpose of the moon voyage is the development of a nuclear space-shield. In *The Calculus Affair*, one of Calculus's inventions is at risk of being deployed for the development of a weapon of mass destruction: a kind of inverse neutron bomb. The adventures still take place against the background of an endangered world peace.

After these Cold War adventures, Tintin joins the battle with human-trafficking Arabs who are trading black Muslims from Senegal and Sudan: *The Red Sea Sharks* (1956–1958). Head of this evil enterprise appears to be media tycoon Rastapopoulos, owner of Arabair and dealer in pearls and canons. The theme is familiar: the battle against global capitalists. The details are familiar too: pearls (Hergé's first cartoon), arms trade (*The Broken Ear*) and a remnant of a visual Jewish stereotype (*America; Cigars*). And again, as in Congo, the "poor blacks" are under the spell of a false faith: they were made to believe that they are on a pilgrimage to Mecca. In this story, which echoes a Catholic social commitment, the clashes between little angels and demons also make a comeback (colour, 42).

Hergé's ode to cross-border friendship in *Tintin in Tibet* (1958–1959) shines against the background of Tibetan Buddhism. But the Grand Abbot is speaking a familiar language. In *Tintin*, he praises the cardinal

virtues, “Blessings upon you, Great Heart, for the strength of your friendship, for your courage and for your steadfastness.” To Haddock, he refers to the New Testament (1 Corinthians 13:2), “You too, Rumbling Thunder—blessings upon you, for in spite of all, you have the faith that moves mountains” (*Tintin in Tibet*, 61). The adventure shows that an alleged enemy (the Yeti) actually was pursuing what is right, truly not an un-Catholic message (Serres 1994). This representation of Buddhism mirrors the same Catholic values as are present throughout the whole series.¹⁶

Even in the last three completed adventures, contemporary Catholic themes are represented. In the satirical whodunit *The Castafiore Emerald* (1961–1962), racism against gypsies is denounced, next to cheap sensation-seeking. In the hijacking drama *Flight 714* (1967–1968), big business is again exposed in a bad light. Under the influence of a truth serum, two millionaires compete in confessing their sins. A new, non-Catholic element, however, is the active role of extra-terrestrial life, saving Tintin and his companions from an erupting volcano.¹⁷ The last completed adventure *Tintin and the Picaros* (1975–1976) is often considered a cynical view of world politics (Pellegrin 2010). However, on principle, Tintin chooses neither left-wing militarism (general Tapioca, supported by eastern-European Borduria), nor right-wing militarism (Alcazar, supported by the United Banana Company). He displays Catholic social teaching’s preferential option for non-violence (Hornsby-Smith 2006). He promises Alcazar an end to his warriors’ dipsomania and requires in turn a non-violent change of power, in other words, a contemporary Catholic stance.

In the unfinished album *Tintin and Alph-Art* (1986), Tintin is tracking down a gang of art forgers, who are headed by a spiritual new broom. He has ceased going out into the world on the spur of the moment as a committed journalist, as in the first period. He has finished heading investigations into thrilling mysteries, as in the second period. He is only interested in his friends’ well-being. He remains, however, devoted to spiritual values,

16. The Dominican theologian Dominique Cerbelaud (Cerbelaud 2004) reads Tintin as a Christ-like character, who, in this adventure, searches for and weeps over his beloved disciple. One reason why this reading doesn’t convince is the fact that the author uses insights from biblical studies after 1960.

17. Earlier interests in conspiracy theory are continued. The science fiction elements are a tribute to Jacques Bergier, co-author of the cult bestseller *Le matin des Magiciens* (1960) [*The Morning of the Magicians*], who claims that the gods were astronauts. According to historian Hugo Frey anti-Semitic stereotypes re-occur, too. Both elements, he claims, can be linked to reactionary ideology (Frey 2008).

and opposed to those who chase after money and power at the cost of human well-being.

The Catholic commitment in those days to non-violence and the protest against global injustice can be traced down to the last adventures of Tintin, as the older dedication to courage and loyalty, human dignity and the common good. Yet Tintin's universe has included new elements, too: Buddhism and esotericism. All elements are increasingly part of a relatively autonomous fictive world that transcends its dependence on sources such as Belgian Catholicism.

Conclusion

Initially, Tintin is a farcical character who succeeds in staying out of his pursuers' hands, just like Charlie Chaplin's and Harold Lloyd's "underdog" characters, who time and again escape from employers and constables. A striking strategy, used by Tintin in order to confront evil, is to surrender to the enemy. With or without intending to, he ends up in the lion's den, and this embarrasses the enemy (Verheijen 2004). In this way, Tintin breaks the chain of desire. He offers himself as a victim, a gesture that would look familiar to Christian readers.

Tintin's famous Scouting spirit was the concretization of social Catholicism, tailor-made for the young readers. In *Le Petit Vingtième's* words, "Scouting is the resurrection in the twentieth century of the Christian ideal of Knighthood" (*Le Petit Vingtième* 15-1-1931, qtd. in Assouline 2009, 38). In this particular version of chivalry, women were absent, as they were in Catholic teaching on the public domain. Catholic social thought, as proclaimed in Belgium between the wars, gains colours in *Tintin*. He breaks through thinking in terms of "left" and "right," not because he transcends the ideological antitheses, but because he represents a more or less utopian view of society, in which traditional authority still applies. In the first period in particular, social Catholic themes are explicit. Language and symbols bear a Catholic signature: invocations of God and heaven, little demons and guardian angels, the good white missionary priest.

Several studies have pointed to a Eurocentric patronizing narrative in the adventures of Tintin, most clearly but not restricted to *Tintin in the Congo* (Dunnett 2009). Tillinac is clearly wrong when he claims that the natives in Tintin never play the role of the villain and that other people's religions are always treated with respect (2011b, 561–562). On the contrary, religious specialists in foreign parts, be they an African sorcerer, an Indian fakir, or a South American medicine man, rarely feel benevolent

towards Tintin and for some reason or other want to sacrifice him and/or his dog Snowy (Pellegrin 201De 3, 207). This Catholicism is less broad-minded than is suggested by Tillinac.

Neither does the assertion that Caesar and Mammon are Tintin's main enemies tally with the facts. The monarchy and Europe's monetary order are accepted. In this way, the comic represents the conservative tendency in early social Catholicism. The political thirst for power that is condemned, is specifically that of communism, militarism, Zionism; avarice is linked with Anglo-Saxon capitalism. The world is threatened by conspiracies of highly placed people with English names or with the looks of the Rich Jew. In themes like these, *Tintin* is exhibiting more affinity with reactionary Rexism than with conservative Christian democracy. However, by siding against militaristic fascism, Tintin distances himself from this militant movement too. In short, he incarnates an anti-revolutionary version of the New Order (Apostolidès 1984, 18–20).

In this way, the comic reflects the orientation of the medium in which it appeared, as well as that of the author. Like many Catholics, Hergé believed in the New Order. Worldwide conspiracies of Jews and Freemasons were alleged to threaten the world. In opposition to the West's wild capitalism and the East's communism, hope was put in a new, strong youth, exemplified by the Catholic Scouts, who would throw off suffocating democracy (Peeters 2003, 177). We see this yearning for the absolute in the utopian variant of Catholic social thinking as well as in Tintin's early adventures.

In the literature regarding Hergé and *Tintin*, the affinity of the author and of his cultural artefact with this specific mode of social Catholicism is recognized only in the beginnings of the *Tintin* series. Hergé's behaviour during the German occupation has been linked with opportunism, but not with Catholicism's ambivalent stance towards National-Socialist regimes. It is rarely noticed that Catholic values implicitly lived on in the fictive world that had meanwhile been created.

Many features of the Catholic worldview as it had been unfolded in the first period can also be perceived in the second and third period. And the themes that are important in post-war Catholicism in Belgium can be heard in *Tintin* as well. And yet no recognizable, explicit, Catholic whole appears before the average reader. One reason for this is that Catholic identifying marks have become scarce. In the English translation, for example, the original exclamation "Mon Dieu!" is replaced by "Great snakes!" Moreover, with increasing frequency, Tintin's adventures

take place in a mythical universe that can very well do without being supported by a Catholic worldview in the real world. The stories still have their starting points in current affairs, but they refer first and foremost to Tintin's own world, and they make a stronger appeal to the imagination (Bourdu 1986). Present-day readers look at the earlier stories from this mythical perspective,¹⁸ but as these stories have been re-drawn and cleaned up, *Tintin's* social Catholic message is less conspicuous than it was for the first readers. Moreover, *Tintin's* readership is no longer Catholic. Much of what we now consider as typically "Tintin," however, such as the battle against secret societies (Vandromme 1994, 263–271), clearly originates from a Catholic worldview. In order to unearth this, we just need to do a bit of detective work.

In the literature regarding Hergé and *Tintin* under the supervision of the Hergé Foundation, the story's political and religious aspects are usually smoothed over. In *L'Osservatore Romano's* coverage, *Tintin* is embraced by Catholicism, but stripped of his controversial social-historical *persona*. In this polarity of neutrality politics and confessional apologetics, Catholic values (either controversial or not) are removed from the picture. Yet, the implicit Catholicism in *Tintin* questions both the presumed neutrality of secular culture, and the abstraction and irrelevance of Catholic social thought.

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18. Examples include the anonymous "Rich Jew" sitting next to a blonde American actress in *Tintin in America* (b/w 114; colour 57), who appears to many readers as Rastapopoulos. Characteristics of the later, more eastern-European, country of Borduria, are easily read into the earlier, Italian, version in *King Ottocar's Sceptre*, including by Hergé himself. Annick Pellegrin (2013, 167–172) has laid out the patchwork-identity of the Latin-American countries Tintin visits.

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